

VZCZCXRO7610
RR RUEHCD RUEHGD RUEHHO RUEHMC RUEHNG RUEHNL RUEHRD RUEHRS RUEHTM
DE RUEHME #2342/01 2191702
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 071702Z AUG 09
FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7779
INFO RUEHXC/ALL US CONSULATES IN MEXICO COLLECTIVE
RHMFIUU/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON DC
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHINGTON DC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RHMFIUU/HQ USNORTHCOM
RUEAHLA/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 002342

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [MX](#)

SUBJECT: MEXICAN GOVERNMENT REACHES OUT TO CIVIL SOCIETY ON
MERIDA INITIATIVES

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Continuing to improve its dialogue with Mexican civil society on security issues and the Merida Initiative, the GOM convened on August 6 a second open attendance meeting with NGOs and civil society. The Secretariat of Government (SEGOB) and the Secretariat of Foreign Relations (SRE) jointly hosted the forum, with the Technical Secretary of the National Council Against Addictions (CONADIC). Embassy section heads and officers from NAS, USAID, POL, DAO and ODC all participated in discussing aspects of Merida programming and implementation. The GOM opened the event to representatives of civil society and academic institutions who deal with topics related to the Merida Initiative (MI), such as drug addiction, security, human rights, justice system reform, and organized crime. The stated goal of the meeting was to facilitate GOM dialogue with civil society and better understand civil society perspectives. This session was the third formal meeting sponsored by the GOM, with SRE and SEGOB hosting an inaugural March 2 open meeting and a private gathering on July 7. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) SRE's Merida coordinator Ambassador Benito Andion stated the GOM seeks to improve dialogue and transparency between civil society and the U.S. and Mexican governments. SEGOB and SRE representatives at the event called for true "back and forth" communication. They emphasized the recently redesigned MI website hosted by SRE, and pledged to post more detailed information to it, particularly relating to MI budget and expenditures. Additionally, GOM representatives discussed in depth the administration's demand reduction efforts under Merida, including electronically linking treatment centers through secure telecommunications systems and training and certifying private rehabilitation facilities. CONADIC also noted that the Secretariat of Health currently sponsors 302 "New Life" drug rehabilitation centers nationwide and will soon have 329. Following the GOM's presentations, the Embassy's USAID Director and his staff provided an overview of the agency's programs in Mexico, both independent of and related to the MI. NAS Director provided a comprehensive Merida overview and highlighted the improvements in GOM-USG cooperation.

¶3. (SBU) The audience included over 60 investigative and research-based NGOs (such as FUNDAR), human rights groups (such as Fundacion Casa Alianza), federal government agencies (military and civilian), security advocacy groups (including Mexico Unido Contra la Delincuencia), and press. The open question and answer session was a mix of procedural questions, which largely centered on Merida budget and resource distribution issues, calls for greater emphasis on

demand reduction programs, and a few pointed criticisms ranging from perceived unwarranted slights to Mexico's human rights record to allegations that MI may be a pretext for U.S. meddling in the hemisphere. A press attendee asked about the status of the 15 percent report and its impact on Merida funding. Polcouns responded that the 15 percent report is considered a dialogue with the U.S. Congress rather than a certification mechanism, noting but noted that Congress ultimately has funding authority. Many NGOs focused on the funding criteria and the allocation of Merida resources, with a view to understanding how they might participate and qualify for Merida funding for their work. USAID provided a summary of its budgeting process, and SEGOB suggested that this and similar information be posted to the SRE website for broader consumption.

¶4. (SBU) The event provided an invaluable opportunity to hear from civil society organizations, particularly those which are less prominent on the national stage. A representative from a woman's organization, the Red Nacional de Mujeres Vigilantes Social, gave a passionate defense of the Mexican military's work in combating organized crime and noted that her organization has participated with the military in patrols in Michoacan State. Other NGO delegates highlighted the need to observe carefully justice reform efforts in Chihuahua State to determine what has been successful, enabling better planning for other states.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Coming shortly after the Washington Post's recent articles on criticism by national and international NGOs of the GOM's human rights performance in its fight

MEXICO 00002342 002 OF 002

against the narco-cartels, this third encounter was both timely and productive. Senior-level Embassy participation enhanced both our exposure to and credibility with Mexico's civil society. The session produced more more positive cross-talk than aggressive questioning, and evinced a manifest desire by all participants to continue the mutual engagement and education process. As Merida moves forward, ramping up deliveries of hardware and training this fall, the Embassy plans to hold a series of small, sectoral conversations with focused subsets of SRE-SEGOB attendees. We must accept that Washington and international HR groups will support holding back 15 percent of Merida funding as a means to leverage improved GOM and SEDENA transparency. However, relatively few of the Mexican civil society groups are as strident in this message. The majority simply seek more information about how to secure funding for their important work through inclusion in the Merida Initiative. Visit Mexico City's Classified Web Site at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/mexicocity> and the North American Partnership Blog at <http://www.intelink.gov/communities/state/nap> /

FEELEY